

**Remarks Following a Meeting With
Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice
and Secretary of Defense Donald H.
Rumsfeld**

May 1, 2006

I want to thank Secretary Rice and Secretary Rumsfeld. And General Pace, thank you for being here as well. Thank you for joining me this morning.

They came by the Oval Office to brief me on their recent trip to Iraq. First of all, I appreciate them both going over there to send my best wishes to the new Government and to Prime Minister-designate Maliki, as well as the new Speaker and the President. I had spoken to them on the phone, but I thought it was very important for both Secretaries to go firsthand, to be there with the leadership to say, we're supporting them. It's very important for these two senior officials to sit down with these new folks and say, "You have our support, and we want you to succeed."

And they brought back interesting impressions from the three new leaders. They said they were optimistic people, that they're full of energy, and they're very eager to succeed. And that's really important for the American people to know, that we've got partners in this effort who are dedicated to a unified Iraq and dedicated to putting a Government together that is one that will represent all the Iraqi people.

This new Government is going to represent a new start for the Iraqi people. It's a Government that understands they've got serious challenges ahead of them. And the three leaders spoke to Secretary Rice and Secretary Rumsfeld about their need to deploy the growing strength of the Iraqi security forces in such a way as to defeat the terrorists and the insurgents. And we will continue to support them in that effort that they talked about: the need to establish control over the militias and other unauthorized armed groups and enforce the rule of law. And we will support them in these efforts to achieve that important objective. They talked about the need to rebuild infrastructure and strengthen their economy, and we agree with that assessment.

And finally, they talked about the need to make sure that all Iraqis share in the benefits of this new democracy. A new Iraqi Government represents a strategic opportunity for America—and the whole world, for that matter. This Nation of ours and our coalition partners are going to work with the new leadership to strengthen our mutual efforts to achieve success, a victory in this war on terror. This is a—we believe this is a turning point for the Iraqi citizens, and it's a new chapter in our partnership.

The Secretaries began building this new partnership during their trip. In other words, the Iraqi leaders saw that we are committed to helping them succeed. They need to know that we stand with them. And the Iraqi people need to know that we stand with them, that we understand the strategic importance of a free Iraq in the Middle East, and that we understand the need to deny safe haven to the terrorists who have caused such turmoil and havoc inside of Iraq.

There's going to be more tough days ahead. These Secretaries know that. They're realistic people. They have brought an assessment of what they saw on the ground, and some of it's positive and, obviously, there's some difficult days ahead because there's still terrorists there who are willing to take innocent life in order to stop the progress of democracy. But this Government is more determined than ever to succeed, and we believe we've got partners to help the Iraqi people realize their dreams.

Last December, the Iraqi people voted to have a free government. I know it seems like a long time ago for the American people, but what we have begun to see now is the emergence of a unity government to represent the wishes of the Iraqi people. Last December, millions of people defied the terrorists and killers and said, "We want to be free; we want a unity government." And now what has happened is, after compromise and politics, the Iraqis have come together to form that Government. And our Secretaries went over there to tell them that we look forward to working with them as partners in peace.

So I want to thank you all for going. I appreciate your dedication to the cause of peace. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:36 a.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Gen. Peter Pace, USMC, Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff; and Prime Minister-designate Jawad al-Maliki, Speaker of the Parliament Mahmoud al-Mashhadani, and President Jalal Talabani of Iraq.

Remarks on Presenting the Preserve America Presidential Awards

May 1, 2006

Thank you all. Thanks for the introduction. [Laughter] Laura and I welcome you here to the White House. We are privileged to have some of our country's really great community leaders and preservationists here in the Rose Garden. This is a fitting place, we think, to honor those who work hard to preserve our Nation's history and protect the natural beauty of the country.

This is a—this Rose Garden is one of America's historic treasures. I spend a lot of time moving out here. [Laughter] The commitment of the folks here to preserve the unique treasures in your own communities means that you celebrate our Nation's history, and you help instill a love of our Nation's natural beauty for future generations. And that's why we have such an event, to encourage people to preserve and instill—preserve what is important and instill love for the—for our natural treasures.

I appreciate not only the First Lady of the United States being here, but I appreciate the first lady of Florida being here—*mi canada*. Thank you. Give Brother my best. [Laughter] Tell him he's doing a fine job. [Laughter]

I want to thank Administrator Steve Johnson of the EPA. Thank you for being here, Steve. Lynn Scarlett, who's the Acting Secretary of the Department of Interior; Fran Mainella, who is the Director of the National Park Service; and Senator Craig Thomas of Wyoming—thanks for coming. Appreciate you being here, Senator. Thanks for taking time out of your busy schedule.

I appreciate Bruce Cole, who's the Chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities, joining us. And it's good to see my old friend John Nau. He's the Chairman of the Advisory Council on Historic Preserva-

tion; he's the chairman of the Texas Historical Commission—and he's a fine lad. [Laughter] It's good to see Bobbie too. Thanks for coming. And we appreciate all the members of the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation. Thank you for serving. Thank you for your dedication to our country.

Laura and I want every American to have a chance to learn about this country's history, and one of the best ways to do so is to visit our country's great historical landmarks. So in 2003, we created—actually, she created—she told me to create, which I did—[laughter]—the Preserve America Presidential Awards, to recognize outstanding contributions to America's cultural and natural heritage. By the efforts—their efforts, today's award winners have drawn tourists to historic sites and towns; they've revitalized communities and our natural spaces; and they've opened up new opportunities for learning.

The first Preserve America award winner we honor this year is Mission San Luis. It's a project that has reconstructed the former Western capital of Spanish Florida in Tallahassee. The mission was burned to the ground over 300 years ago. And the State of Florida, in partnership with local and private groups, successfully recreated nearly every detail of the mission. The reconstruction team used original mission documents to ensure the highest level of historical accuracy. By their painstaking effort, they have helped Mission San Luis rise from the ashes to an educational, cultural, and historical resource reflecting Florida's beginnings. Congratulations, and welcome.

Our second award recipient is the State of Maryland. Through a new program called Maryland Heritage Areas, the State is protecting areas of historical significance and increasing heritage, tourism, and educational opportunities. State and community leaders are investing in projects to highlight special parts of American history, including the location where Harriet Tubman's Underground Railroad helped slaves escape to the North, and Fort McHenry, the site that inspired Francis Scott Key to write America's National Anthem. And I appreciate the good folks of Maryland for highlighting the amazing sites you've got in your State. And welcome; thank you for coming.